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IS ALCOHOLISM INCREASING AMONG AMERICAN WOMEN ?

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THE great drink problem of this country is governed by forces and conditions that are practically unknown. To the scientific student a few outline facts appear, surrounded by regions of mystery, clearly under the control of laws not yet discovered.

One of these facts is the tide-like movement of inebriety when seen from a higher point of view. Thus distinct periods of years will be noted in which all forms of inebriety will increase up to a certain point, then recede in about the same ratio.

Statistics of persons arrested for inebriety, extending over long periods, will point to certain years in which a maximum in numbers was reached, followed by a retrograde movement back to a minimum. This tide-like movement is sometimes clear, then obscure. Often it is marked by both epidemic and endemic waves, and is traced in the prevalence of inebriety in towns and cities, and in the reaction noted by temperance revivals.

This psychological ebb and flow was pointed out by Dr. Westphal in Sweden many years ago, and an interval of seventeen years was indicated as the time between the maximum and minimum periods of inebriety in that country. Shorter periods have been noted by other observers in different countries.

Many very startling facts point to this wonderful cycle and drink orbit, and help to explain the strange temperance revivals which spring up and sweep over the country, dying away with the same mystery and suddenness. Such movements are undoubtedly the backward swing of high tides of inebriety. The Washingtonian revival of 1840, the Red Ribbon movement and others of recent date are good illustrations.

The histories of large cities and towns supply many startling confirmatory facts of periods of inebriety and intense temperance revivals following each other with a strange, fascinating mystery. Like the ebb and flow in politics, religion and the great social movements, these drink cycles or waves point to ranges of causes and conditions awaiting future discovery.

While many of the causes of inebriety as seen in the individual are both preventable and curable, there are other unknown psychological and physical forces that control the form and direction of the inebriety of both sexes.

Whatever inebriety is in Europe, or may have been in the past, it is in this country a brain and nerve disease, marked by mental and physical failure, exhaustion and central degeneration. Any inquiry concerning the prevalence of inebriety among either men or women cannot be answered by appeals to statistics alone.

The primary facts must be sought in the physiological and psychological conditions which favor or antagonize inebriety.

The conviction that inebriety is diminishing in this country is sustained by all scientific study and observation. Some of the facts on which this is based may be briefly stated.

Inebriety is becoming more impulsive and precipitate; the period of moderate drinking is shorter; the quantity of strong spirits used is greater and the duration of the inebriety is steadily diminishing. The inebriate of to-day is often delirious, maniacal, suicidal, and criminal in his conduct and suffers from marked nerve and brain disease. If a periodical drinker, he is often afflicted with epilepsy, general paralysis and delusional manias.

The brain and nervous system break down early, and acute diseases of the lungs or kidneys are usually fatal; or the victim disappears in an asylum, poor house, or prison. The intensity and constant excitement of American life, with its strains and drains, neglect of healthy living, and bad surroundings, the sudden changes and disappointments, and the rapid elations and depressions, are some of the prominent factors which have changed the type of inebriety. These forces bring all cases into greater prominence, and give a false appearance of a marked increase in the numbers of victims.

The fact is more and more apparent that alcohol cannot be used in moderation by the average American. The forefathers might use spirits for a life time and never be inebriates or exces-

sive drinkers, but the children who drink have only a brief period of moderate drinking. They become excessive drinkers at once, and soon merge into paupers and criminals, or die suddenly. The tremendous forces of heredity which the overstrained, exhausted generation transmits to its descendants are still more active, predisposing causes for the development of inebriety, insanity and various allied diseases. Climatic states also intensify and favor the brain exhaustion that leads to inebriety. These are some of the forces and the subsoil from which inebriety grows luxuriantly. The prominence of such cases is not evidence of their increase, but by contrast brings into view the increasing number of total abstainers.

Thus the form of inebriety is changing, and while certain local causes may account for its apparent increase in particular sections, a great antagonistic undercurrent of evolution is slowly and surely drawing lines of limitation and breaking up the soil from which it grows. This is true in a large sense concerning inebriety among women. Inquiry along the lowest levels of social life, as noted in court records of women arrested for drunkenness and petty crime, confirms this. Such records are worthless as evidence of the inebriety of women, because they depend on the opinions and impulses of judges and officers who may wish to shield or expose the culprit. Inebriety is associated and covered up with assault, larceny, misdemeanor, breach of peace, and other charges that seem to alternate one with the other, and such persons are arrested many times for the same offence the same year.

Recently a woman was arrested in Liverpool, who had been arraigned over seven hundred times for drunkenness and its associated charges. Women seen in the police courts in this country charged with such offences are always profoundly degenerate, both mentally and physically. They are commonly the mere wreckage of worn-out foreign families far down on the road to race extinction. Drunkenness, prostitution, and lawlessness of all forms in women are unmistakable signs of disease and early dissolution. They are the unfit and the last remnants of the race-stock hurried on to death by a law that knows no shade or shadow of turning. Only a small minority of American women are found at this level. On the street at nightfall, in large cities and low circles, a certain number of inebriate women may be

found, but these are largely poor demented beings of foreign birth, paupers in mind and body.

Higher up in society it is a noticeable fact, that on occasions of great public excitement, as at political conventions, horse races, and other meetings where both sexes mingle and spirits are used freely, intoxicated women are rarely seen. The same is true in society, on the street, at the theatre, and other public places. Within a few years wines have been gradually disappearing from the social boards and society begins to frown on any excess manifest in public. These and other facts sustain the belief that American women are becoming more and more temperate.

It is the common observation of both specialists and family physicians that inebriate women are concealed often as skeletons in the households, and that strong efforts are constantly made to cover up their personality. Associated with the use of spirits is an increasing dread of exposure and a shrinking from society, and even from relatives and friends, and also a disposition to retreat behind the mask of various nervous diseases. When spirits are used for any length of time the disorders take on a periodical form in which hysteria and other emotional symptoms are prominent. It may be said to be a rule, to which the exception brings ample proof, that the use of alcohol in women very soon merges into some other disorder, usually drug-taking, and the spirits are abandoned.

The decrease of drinking among women is fully confirmed by the facts of heredity. In families of moderate and excessive drinking parents, the girls rarely become inebriates, while the boys, as a rule, develop the parents' maladies.

Numerous instances like the following are within the common observation of every one : One or both parents may use wine on the table daily. The father may use wine to excess, at intervals or continuously and the mother be a nervous and neurotic woman. The boys will drink to excess sooner or later, and the girls will have a defective nervous system, and turn to narcotics for relief, using opium, chloral or other drugs. The children of these girls will develop inebriety and similar diseases from the slightest exposure. Alcoholism may appear in the female side, but it will be exceptional, and naturally merge into drug-taking or other disease. It may appear in a paroxysmal form, and apparently start from irregularities of life and living, but it will always be found associated with nerve and brain defects.

The direct alcoholic heredity running through the male line is changed and diverted in the female side. This heredity always leaves the females with defective vital force and unstable brain vigor, also with weak power of control. The strain of the reproductive period brings on central exhaustion, with a strong tendency to organic disease. The female neurotic may use alcohol for the exhilaration which it brings, but only until she discovers some other drug with more pleasing effects.

Vast ranges of causes are at work far back of the first use of spirits or drugs. The brain exhaustion and consequent unrest of certain people, together with the constant strain to adjust themselves to the changing conditions of life, will of necessity produce a certain number of inebriates, both alcoholic and opium, together with various nervous diseases. This class will be limited and quickly crowded out. Certain local causes may seem to favor their increase at certain times, but behind this there is an inherent antagonistic force that limits this form of degeneration and checks its increase. It is the law of the survival of the fittest, which is of universal application.

The emancipation of women from the slavery of caste and ignorance, and the steady upward movement in mental and physical development, will prevent any general increase of alcoholism or inebriety. Psychological drink-waves may come and go, and tides of degenerative emigrants may bring an increase of inebriety for a brief time, but remedial forces will quickly neutralize and readjust the race march from the lower to the higher.

Many causes which seemingly are very active in Europe, increasing the number of female inebriates, do not exist here. Inebriety over there is a condition more or less fixed; here it is an accident and incident constantly changing. Change of climate, surroundings, and environment are often potent remedies for this accident. American women are great travellers, great observers, and great readers of current history. They are far more sensitive than men to the evolutions and revolutions of daily life. The constant educational forces of travel, of lectures, of the theatre, of literary societies, of churches and reform movements, of public schools, and the possibility of leadership and prominence in many directions, all lead away from alcoholism. When these forces are followed by nerve and brain exhaustion they will favor drug-taking more than the use of spirits.

Temperance-reform movements are largely sustained by women. A recent writer has said that over half a million women are active workers in the temperance field, and not one per cent. of this number have been or are users of alcohol or opium. Among men a very large per cent. of active temperance workers are reformed inebriates. One reason for this is that women alcoholics and opium-takers quickly disappear from society and shrink from all publicity or possible reference to their past. Another reason is advanced that women are the greatest possible sufferers from inebriety, and hence are more sensitive to the dangers of drink, and turn to reform movements for relief.

In England, it is asserted that patent medicines composed largely of alcohol are popular and have an immense sale among women. In this country such medicines are sold almost exclusively to moderate and excessive drinking men. The division of bar rooms into general and family entrances (the outgrowth of the last few years) is thought to be evidence of increased drinking among women. A slight inquiry will show that it is the opposite. It is a sign of the growing ill repute of the saloon, and the desire of its patrons to conceal their visits.

For several years past a noticeable falling off in the sale of spirits to families in cases and packages has been apparent in all large towns and cities. The family trade of stronger liquors and wines is changing to light beers and mineral waters. A rapidly increasing demand has sprung up for table mineral waters, and every drug and grocery store is supplying this want. This is limited to the homes of the middle and upper classes, and such waters are consumed by the women as well as the men.

If, as some men assert, women are becoming drug-takers, using narcotics with increasing frequency, there is little or no evidence of it in public observation. There can be no doubt that there are many women inebriates who use both alcohol and opium. If the number is increasing they would become more prominent, and the evidence of this fact would be clear and accessible in many ways.

The American woman has never been a straggler in the race-march, but is always in the van, and a wide survey of the field will show that inebriety of all forms must of necessity be diminishing.

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